

# Why is this government hell-bent on failing?

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The big political story of today will be all about George Osborne's Fiscal Charter. The focus will be in John McDonnell and whether or not Labour MPs will back him, but that is unfortunate. The substance of the issue is what matters, and is whether or not that Charter makes any sense or not.

In my opinion, and that of a great many economists I know, George Osborne is not just playing petty politics with this Charter, [he's offering economic illiteracy when doing so](#). That is unfortunate for three reasons. First, that undermines the political process. It really should be about more than game playing.

Second, he undermines his own economic credibility by seeking to guarantee that he will shrink the economy in perpetuity when, in fact, pursuing growth is a much better (indeed, the only viable) way of shrinking debt as a proportion of GDP.

Third, imposing a legally binding obligation upon himself to do something it is almost impossible he can deliver is just bad politics. No one in any party should voluntarily set out the criteria by which their own failure can be assessed but that is what Osborne is going.

For this third reason this whole escapade might be considered very odd but for one thing, which is that this whole self destructive path of setting out to pursue policies that they cannot deliver seems to be at the core of current Conservative Party policy. There are numerous other examples, of which I will select only a few.

You can't say, for example, that you will make people better off by cutting benefits and introducing a supposed living wage when it is obvious that people will be very much worse off. Millions of people will rumble you.

It is also impossible to meet growing health sector demand and say the health budget cannot rise any further. Those who cannot access healthcare will notice.

As will those who have been promised health care seven days a week notice when it is not delivered.

In addition, you cannot say you're devolving tax raising powers to local authorities to empower local democracy when glaringly obviously all you are actually doing is devolving the need to deliver yet more cuts that harm local health, social and childcare services on which so many depend.

Finally (for now) saying you want to renegotiate with Europe and that you will succeed when you haven't specified what you want from that process but then saying, confidentially, that people will support your outcome in a referendum without having any obvious basis for doing so looks like the ultimate exercise in political folly.

There is, then, it seems something akin to a self-destruct button in this government that I find very worrying. I am well aware all politicians offer things that aren't delivered, but as I have over the years seen so many people in all parts of life do the same thing time and again (from promising positive cash flows and the going cap in hand to the bank to borrow more, to simply promising to do music practice and then never doing so) I realise that optimistic good intent is a characteristic a very large number of people share. It seems society is also capable of forgiving it.

These promises by the current government do not, however, fall into that category. The promise of a perpetual government surplus is beyond the ability of a government to deliver.

So too is seven day healthcare, or indeed five day healthcare, on the budget the government is willing to deliver and any reasonably informed person knows that.

The claims on increasing incomes and devolving power to local government also look to be knowingly wrong from almost any perspective.

So why is this government setting out to fail on so many fronts? What is the political reasoning? How can it win politically from doing so at this stage in the electoral cycle?

Is the aim to lose?

Or is to undermine democratic politics fatally?

Or to destroy their own credibility?

And what might their gain be?

I stress, these are serious questions and are based on the assumption that the government is made up of competent people. Whatever confusion John McDonnell might have created in the last week or two in reaching what I think is the right decision is as nothing compared to the confusion I suffer, and I think many people suffer from, when watching a government seemingly hell-bent on setting itself up to fail.

And for the record, let me say I wish it was not doing that. This will end in far too many

tears for any reasonable person to wish that these policies were being pursued.